

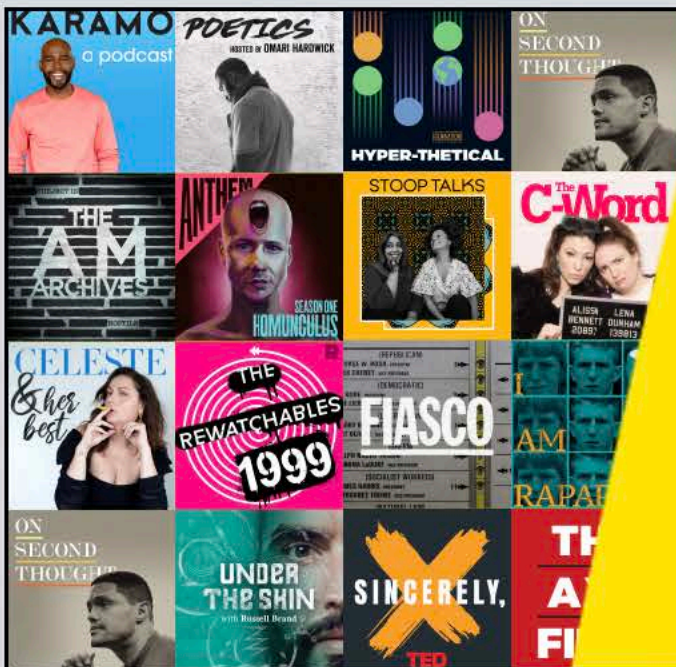
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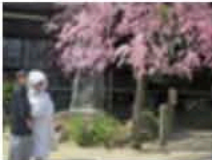
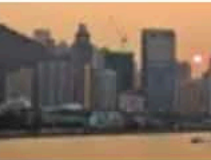
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Pickleball at sea? These cruise ships have courts



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Cruising the South China Sea

The Holland America Volendam docked in Shanghai, China.



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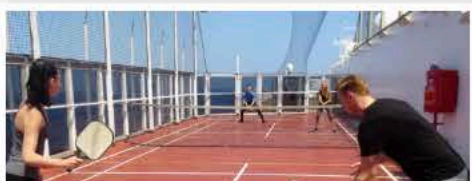
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Dan Fellner, Special for The Republic

Published 5:00 a.m. MT March 30, 2018 | Updated 3:25 p.m. MT April 2, 2018



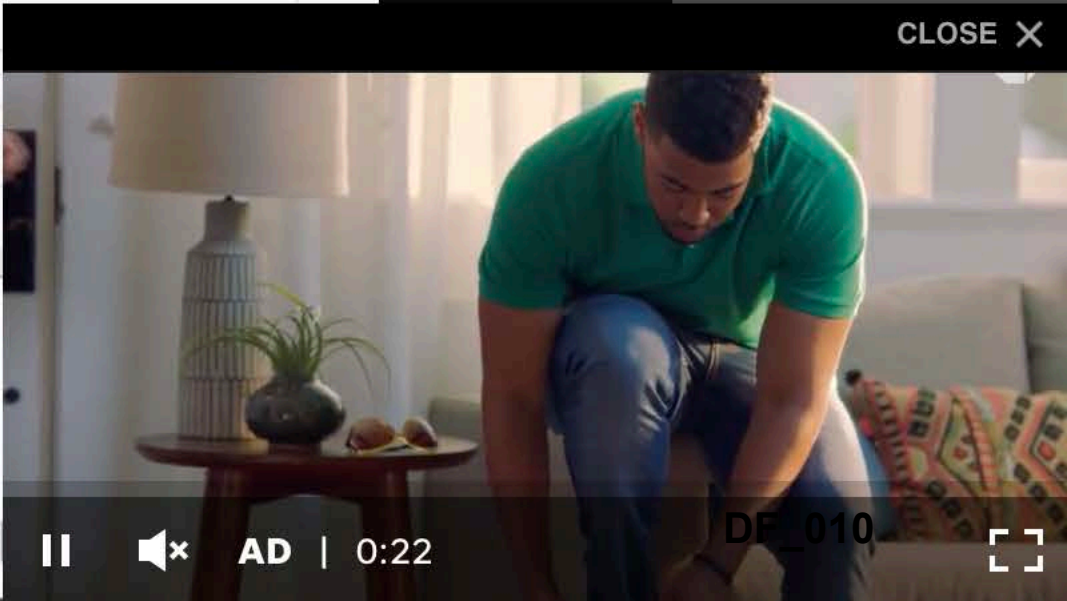
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Dan Fellner, Special for The Republic

Published 5:00 a.m. MT March 30, 2018 | Updated 3:25 p.m. MT April 2, 2018



(Photo: Dan Fellner)

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SOUTH CHINA SEA – Pickleball, one of the fastest growing sports in America, is starting to make a splash on the high seas.

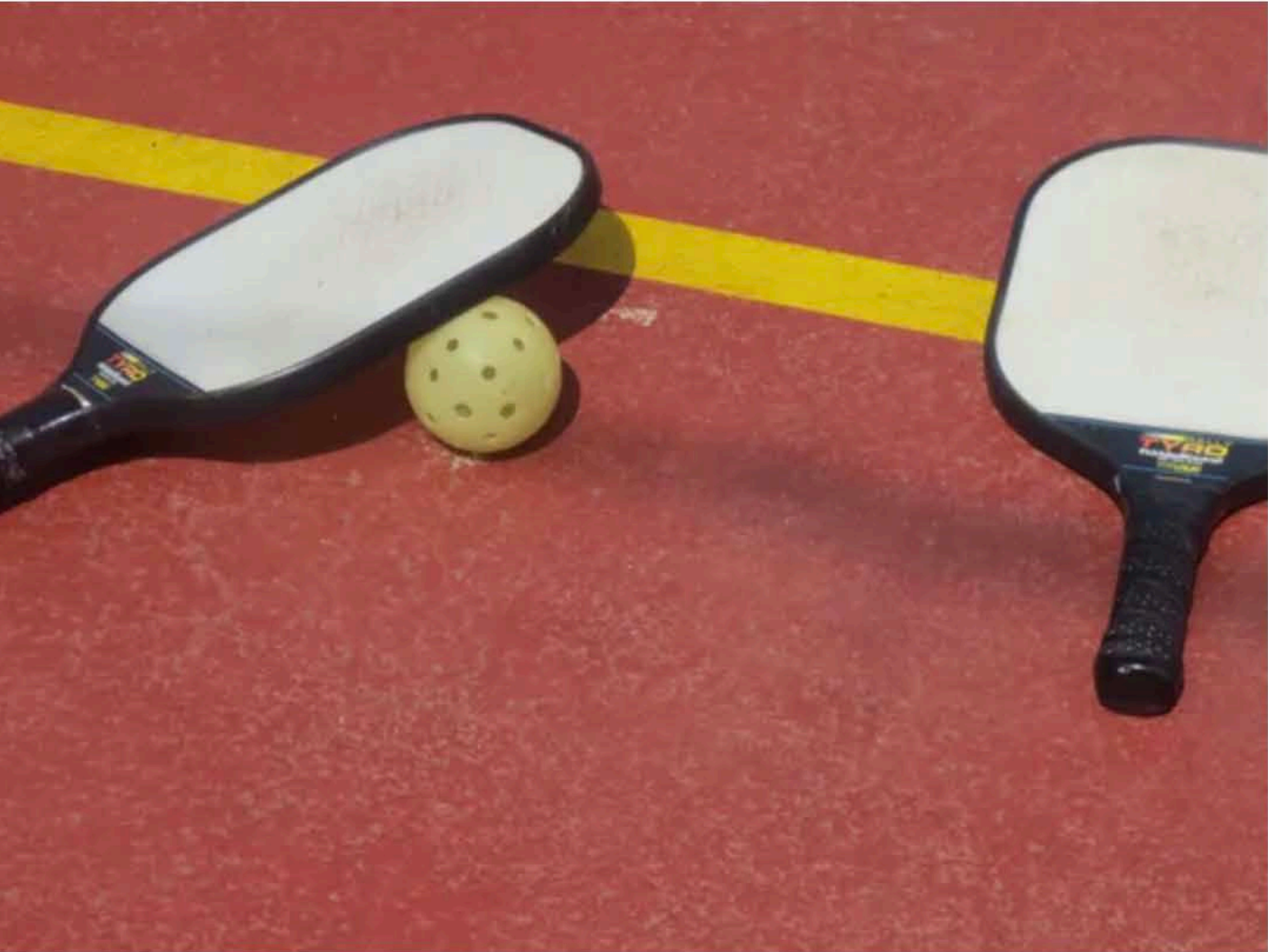
The sport, hugely popular in the Phoenix area, especially in active-retirement communities, recently was added to the sports offered on all 14 Holland

America ships. And the line’s newest ship, the Nieuw Statendam, which debuts in December, will feature the game as well.

Other cruise lines, including Princess and Regent Seven Seas, also have added pickleball to some of their ships.

Pickleball is a racket sport that combines elements of tennis, table tennis and badminton. Paddles are made of wood or composite materials; the ball resembles a wiffleball. The sport can be played with two or four players, although doubles is far more common.

Pickleball popularity takes off



Pickleball paddles and ball. (Photo: Dan Fellner)

Pickleball was invented in the 1960s in Washington state, but only recently has seen a huge growth in popularity; it now routinely attracts more players than tennis in age 55 and older housing developments. The USA Pickleball Association, which is headquartered in Surprise, calls it “the fastest growing sport in North America.”

Erik Elvejord, Holland America’s director of public relations, says adding pickleball to the company’s ships was a no-brainer “because of many requests we were getting

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Erik Elvejord, Holland America’s director of public relations, says adding pickleball to the company’s ships was a no-brainer “because of many requests we were getting from guests.”

As an avid pickleball player myself, I was pleasantly surprised to see “meet for a game of pickleball” in the daily program on a recent 14-day Asian cruise on the Holland America Volendam.

I quickly ventured up to the ship’s sports deck where Holland America had retrofitted a court that had been used for mini-tennis. The costs for the cruise line were minimal – put some yellow lines on the court, buy paddles and balls, and lower the net a few inches. The courts are surrounded with netting to keep stray balls from landing in the ocean.

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The nets may not quite be to exact specifications and the swirling winds can blow a well-executed shot off course. But despite some of the challenges, I was delighted – after years of cruising – to finally have the chance to play the game at sea while working off a few calories from the Volendam’s tempting desserts.

Cruise passengers like pickleball

Jack Thomas, the national president of the pickleball association and a Scottsdale resident, says it’s about time cruise lines started hopping on the pickleball bandwagon.

“I think the cruise industry has figured out that pickleball is a very inexpensive way to attract and entertain their passengers and will soon become a must-have onboard activity,” he says. “It is super easy to learn to play, great fun for all ages and creates camaraderie among fellow shipmates.”

Tino Carrillo, the Volendam’s assistant cruise director who oversees the ship’s sports – table tennis, shuffleboard, basketball and pickleball – says the latter has been a hit with the ship’s mostly older clientele.

“You typically play doubles, so it’s less tiring than some other sports,” he says. “It’s more accessible for everybody. It’s something fresh and new that more and more people are enjoying playing.”

Cruising the South China Sea



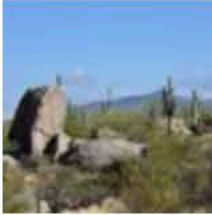
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Cruising the South China Sea



The Holland America Volendam docked in Shanghai, China. (Photo: Dan Fellner)

This particular sailing of the Volendam started in Hong Kong and ended in Shanghai, with stops along the way in the Philippines, Taiwan and Japan.

Many of the ship’s nearly 1,400 passengers – representing 34 countries – had never heard of the sport. But there was a hard-core group of pickleball fanatics who showed up on sea days for open play or tournaments. Some passengers came out of curiosity to check out a game they knew only for its peculiar name.

“My wife and I are in the early stages of planning our first cruise adventure,” Thomas says. “We are not even considering ships without pickleball.”

Dan Fellner of Chandler is a faculty associate at Arizona State University and freelance travel writer. Visit his website, global-travel-info.com.

More about pickleball

U.S.A. Pickleball Association: usapa.org.

Holland America Cruises: hollandamerica.com.

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